

Love by DBSean

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Summary: "Why do you love me?" she asked inquisitively, her textbook temporarily forgotten. "What do you love about me?" And for the first time in a long time, Mike was speechless, not because he didn't have an answer, but because he seemed to have far too many.

1. Mike

"Love"

A/N: Just a drabble, short and sweet. Hope you all like it!

"Love you, Mike."

Mike looked up from his biology homework at the sound of El's voice breaking the comfortable silence the two had been enjoying. He found her smiling shyly across from him, lying on her stomach and propped up on her elbows with her textbook directly beneath her, and Mike couldn't help but return the smile.

It was just past five o'clock, and Mike and El were lying on the floor of the 'living room' of the cabin, their homework sorted into piles around them. It was quickly becoming a routine, the two of them retreating back to either the cabin or the basement of the Wheeler residence after school to work on their homework together, providing them some time to be alone. Freshman year was already off to a busy start, and Mike despaired in the amount of homework he had already received, though this despair was thankfully tempered by El's presence beside him at lunchtime and during a total of three of his classes during the day.

"Love you," Mike responded with a smile of his own, knowing his face had to be as red as the apple he had eaten for lunch earlier that day.

Though the two of them had been saying 'I love you' to one another since that fateful day in the summer when El first asked Mike to define 'love' to her, and she had decided right then and there that she loved him and that was all there was to it, Mike nonetheless always felt his heart skip a beat when he heard her say it to him. And often enough, it was as simple as that: El would say "I love you," Mike would say "I love you, too," and the two would happily return to whatever it is they had been doing, vindicated in their feelings for one another.

This was not one of those times.

"Why?" El asked. She wasn't smiling anymore, but neither was she frowning; if anything, she seemed genuinely curious, perhaps hoping to divert her attention away from the homework before her.

Mike blinked. "What do you mean, why?"

"Why do you love me?" she asked inquisitively, her textbook temporarily forgotten. "What do you love about me?"

And for the first time in a long time, Mike was speechless, not because he didn't have an answer, but because he seemed to have far too many. A thousand different responses flooded his mind all at once, each vying for dominance, all of them seemingly equally as persuasive.

What was there about El that he *didn't* love?

Mike loved how El smiled at him like he was the kindest, gentlest person in the entire world. She smiled at him like merely looking at him made her enormously happy, like seeing his freckled face and messy black hair and gangly limbs was enough to push every bad thought out of her mind. She smiled at him like he was the rising sun bringing an end to the darkest of nights and beckoning in the brightest of days.

Mike loved how El looked to him for answers, her inquisitive nature matching perfectly with his nerdy impulse to explain anything and everything, no matter how mundane or uninteresting, in the most riveting of detail. She wanted to know everything there was about the world she lived in, and no matter what question she had, she always turned to him for answers, trusting he would explain it to her in a way she would understand.

Mike loved how El always told him she missed him when they saw each other, no matter how long (or not long) it had been since last one had seen the other. Every meeting was like their first, and it was rare they greeted each other with anything other than a full embrace, eyes closed and arms wrapped around each other, as though afraid to let go. It was in those moments that El would lean in close to Mike's ear and whisper "I missed you," and Mike's heart would melt and he say "I missed you, too," and all would once again be right with the

world.

Mike loved how El protected him with everything she had, whether she was protecting him from bullies, or interdimensional monsters, or even from himself. She reassured him when he was sad or angry or insecure, and was always more than willing to face anyone else who would dare make him feel such a way. She had risked her life so many times to save his, and given up so much just to be with him. Mike only hoped he would one day be able to pay her back in kind.

Mike loved how El was always close to him, choosing him above all others, consciously or not. In school, they always sat side-by-side, whether in class or at lunch. When hanging out with the rest of the party, El's seat was always the one closest to Mike's, and everyone knew better than to argue. Even when they played Dungeons & Dragons, with Mike serving as Dungeon Master and narrating the game, El sat in his lap and watched the proceedings with apt attention.

Mike loved how El held his hand almost unconsciously, as though their hands belonged together, puzzle pieces that fit together perfectly, and to have them separate was simply the most unnatural thing in the world. They would be walking through the woods, or lying in the grass, or even just sitting around and watching a movie, and Mike would suddenly feel El's fingers intertwine with his own. Indeed, it was rare to see the two without their hands held at all times, and it was for this that both had suffered endless teasing from their friends during many a lunch period.

Mike loved how El cuddled into him no matter where they were or what they were doing, and with little to no regard as to the appropriateness of the situation. Whether they were alone, in school, around family, or hanging out with their friends, whenever El grew bored or tired or simply uncomfortable, she would always respond in the exact same way: cuddle into Mike. Mike knew his face always burnt with embarrassment whenever El leaned in and rested her head on his shoulder or buried her face into his chest, but he also knew he loved the sensation of feeling her so close to him, and he never passed up the opportunity cuddle right back.

Mike loved how El kissed him like it was her favorite thing in the

world to do, which was good, because it was definitely Mike's favorite thing in the world to do. He loved the feel of her lips on his, her breath on his skin, the feeling of warmth and electricity and comfort that enveloped him whenever they kissed. He loved how perfectly they fit together, how every kiss seemed to elicit something beautiful and wonderful and passionate inside of him, something so powerful he felt like he could take on the Mind Flayer all on his own if only it meant he could feel her lips on his one more time. He lived for her kisses, sought them every chance he could get, and knew he never wanted to kiss anyone else for as long as he lived.

"What do you love about me?" she had asked.

Mike could have said any one of the thousand responses bouncing around in his mind, or he could have said all of them, or he could have said none of them and come up with a thousand more in an instant. But instead, gazing into her innocent brown eyes and smiling with all the strength he could muster, tears in his eyes as he realized just how much he loved the girl lying in front of him, the answer came to him, so simple and so pure he didn't know why he hadn't said it immediately. Just one word, that was all he needed.

What did he love about her?

"Everything."

A/N: I'm thinking of maybe doing a sequel of sorts in which El reflects on all the reasons she loves Mike. What do you guys think?

2. El

A/N: You guys asked for a sequel, so here it is! This one is from El's point of view. I tried to avoid repeating reasons from the previous chapter, but some overlap is inevitable. Enjoy!

"What do you love about me?" she had asked.

Now El waited expectantly as Mike struggled to come up with an answer, the gears in his head turning so quickly that she could practically see steam coming out of his ears. She hadn't meant to confuse him – she was genuinely curious as to how and why someone as obviously wonderful as he could possibly love someone as obviously flawed as her – but now she couldn't help but smile to herself as she watched him put the pieces of his puzzled mind together.

El didn't know how long it actually took Mike to formulate his response – she had lost all track of time gazing into his eyes and smiling gently, knowing how much time he was putting into his answer – but she nonetheless found herself blinking wildly when he finally looked back up at her and smiled himself, a confident look upon his face.

"Everything," he finally said.

El smiled shyly and felt her face grow hot. "Cop out."

"But it's true!" Mike protested, his smile pushing up the edges of his cheeks and highlighting the freckles splashed across his face. "I can't choose just one thing! Everything about you is amazing! I love all of it!"

"Mouth-breather," El commented, bowing her head and hoping her curls hid the deep blush quickly spreading across her face. Mike just laughed and bowed his head as well, his own blush growing more noticeable by the second.

"I guess," he agreed with a shrug, a shy smile still plastered across his face. "What about me?"

"What about you?"

"I-I mean...what do you love about me?" Mike asked, stammering slightly, his face only growing redder still. "Like...you're so smart and awesome and beautiful, and stuff. You're like a superhero or something. And I'm just...me. What could you possibly love about me?"

So, El thought about it.

El loved how Mike explained things to her patiently and with a smile on his face, as though there was nothing in the world he enjoyed more than teaching her something new. He defined words for her and used them in sentences, he opened up new horizons and provided her with new opportunities to explore the strange but fascinating world around her. Sometimes El would even ask him a question she already knew the answer to just so she could watch her nerdy boy launch into an explanation like no other, eyes wide and hands gesturing wildly. He was her living dictionary, her walking encyclopedia of the entire world, and she loved him for it.

El loved how Mike seemed to act like she was the only person in the entire world, no matter how many other people were actually around at the time. Whether she was answering the door to find him waiting on the cabin porch or standing amidst three hundred other students in the busy halls of Hawkins High, Mike seemingly had eyes only for her, and he would always beeline it straight for her, ignoring everything (and everyone) else in his path, which often enough led to him tripping or stumbling on his way to her. Nonetheless, he always found his way to her side.

El loved how Mike was always there for her, through thick and thin, through simple and difficult, always ready to lend a helping hand or act as a shoulder to cry on. He walked her home from school every day, spoke to her on the phone every night, and even (sometimes) broke Hopper's rules by visiting without permission or sneaking into her room in the middle of the night. El sometimes felt like she couldn't so much as turn around without bumping into Mike, but, far from being irritated by this, she reveled in it, took solace in it, knowing Mike would always be there for her, no matter what.

El loved how Mike's face turned a brilliant shade of red whenever he was embarrassed or caught by surprise, and she did everything possible to ensure his freckled cheeks were constantly on fire. She loved holding his hand or cuddling into him or whispering into his ear, only to pull back and watch as he blushed deeply, and it would make her giggle knowing she could do that to him. She already thought he was the most handsome boy in the world (though she preferred to call him 'pretty'), but nothing made her swoon faster than seeing him light up like a Christmas tree.

El loved how Mike gave her gifts, whether they were store-bought presents or handmade items or even just trips to the middle of nowhere so they could spend time together. He had given her a fancy necklace for Christmas this past year, and had surprised her by showing up on her porch on Valentine's Day with a bundle of (mostly dead) flowers and a box half-full of chocolates (Dustin having gotten to the heart-shaped container before Mike could stop him). Sometimes he would get her gifts just because, just to show he cared, like buying her a book or a movie, or making her special Eggos for lunch, or writing a poem meant only for her.

El loved how Mike made her feel safe. From government conspiracies to alternate dimensions to high school locker rooms, El knew the world could be a scary place, but so long as Mike was there with her, she knew nothing could harm her. He was her rock, her security blanket, her living, breathing reminder that the world could also be a warm and happy place, and that there were people who genuinely cared about her. She felt safe in his embrace, resting her head on his chest or hearing his voice in her ear, reassuring her that everything was going to be okay. And she believed him.

El loved how Mike held her in his arms like she was the most precious thing in the world to him, perhaps with the realization that, to him, at least, she really was. It was rare the two of them weren't hugging or embracing in one way or another, and El knew it was because Mike literally never wanted to let her go. She remembered the three hundred and fifty three days he had spent waiting for her, hiding in the blanket fort and whispering into his Supercomm and praying she could hear him, and she knew how much it had hurt to him do so. As such, she couldn't blame him for sometimes hugging

her just a little too long, or holding her just a little too tight; indeed, she would be lying if she said she didn't appreciate it.

And just as Mike loved how El kissed him, so too did El love how Mike kissed her. She would give up all the Eggos in the world if it meant she could keep kissing Mike for the rest of her life. Sometimes she stayed up all night just thinking about it, and her face would grow hot and she would smile and bite her lip and want nothing more than to kiss him right then and there; on more than one occasion, she had called him up on the Supercomm just to tell him so. She loved how he had to bend down slightly to catch her lips with his, how he sometimes cupped her cheek in his hand or wrapped his arm around her waist, how he closed her eyes and pulled her in and gave her everything he had, everything he was, and everything he was ever going to be.

"What could you possibly love about me?" That's what Mike had asked her, as if there weren't a thousand reasons she was madly in love with him. How could he not see it? How was it not glaringly obvious?

El smiled despite herself. No wonder Mike had taken so long to answer when she had asked. She loved him for so many reasons, she couldn't decide what to pick. But she saw him watching her, waiting, a look of uncertainty upon his face, as though there was even the slightest possibility that she wouldn't come up with an answer, and she knew she had to say something.

Pushing her textbook aside, El sat up and crawled over to where Mike was lying on his stomach across from her, his brow furrowing in confusion as he watched her. El smiled as she looked down at him, a blush spreading across her cheeks as she gently touched his face and brushed aside some of his messy black hair.

What did she love about him?

"Too much," she said softly, before leaning in and kissing him.

A/N: And...scene!